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George McGovern and CIA on Ra Hit Parade

Throughout the rainy summer, Nicaraguans and other Central Americans within reach of Radio Sandino were treated to the grotesque spectacle of prominent U.S. American politicians testifying in praise and support of Managua's Marxist-Leninist comandantes.

Leading the usual flock of "progressive" Democrats from Jesse Jackson to Rep. James Shannon (D., Mass.) is the former senator from South Dakota, George McGovern. Reminiscing on the Sandinistas' airwaves that "our own country was born in revolution," Mr. McGovern

The Americas

by H. Joachim Maitre

stressed that Nicaragua's ruling Ortega brothers—Daniel and Humberto—had won power after a popular revolution. Mr. McGovern concluded: "I am for them. I would be dealing with them on a daily basis if I were president."

Few Nicaraguans have grown accustomed to the cacophony of dissent rushing down from the U.S. and eagerly amplified by the Sandinista propaganda groups. Fewer North Americans realize that partisan speeches, so blatantly rooted in ignorance of conditions in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, deeply affect the morale of those democrats within Nicaragua struggling to survive. True, pro-Sandinista rhetoric is often judged and discounted as a by-product of ruthless party politics up north. But the lack of a clear-cut anti-Sandinista policy in official Washington is seen and feared as more damaging, because with every passing day, U.S. irresolution contributes to the weakening of opposition forces and threatens to result in stabilizing Nicaragua's dictatorship.

What is Washington's strategy? Is it aimed at coexistence with yet another to-

talitarian regime in the immediate neighborhood? Or are the Sandinistas targeted for abolition? What role is Nicaragua's armed opposition to fill in Washington's strategy?

Washington maintains that the Nicaraguan rebels' efforts remain limited to the objective of forcing Managua to stop its arms shipments to the insurgents in El Salvador. But are 15,000 armed men needed to force Managua to stop its support of the insurgency in El Salvador? And why should thousands of Nicaraguan freedom fighters, mislabeled "contras," risk their lives for the survival of freedom and democracy in neighboring El Salvador?

Among the rebels there is agreement that the arms shipments to El Salvador must stop, but that such shipments will stop automatically once the Sandinistas have been toppled. Said a rebel commander fighting in northern Nicaragua: "We are not fighting to stop the weapons. We are fighting to liberate Nicaragua."

Washington has never openly advocated that goal. In fact, one Washingtonian's blunt assessment of the Nicaraguan rebels' chances was broadcast over and over by Radio Sandino:

"... there's no chance that they will be able to overthrow the government. In the resistance you have perhaps 15,000 men with rifles scattered around the open, unpopulated parts of the country. They can't go into the cities, which the government is protecting with tanks, 75,000 men in the army, the militia and the security forces."

This dilettantish assessment, which betrays a near-total innocence toward all theories and methods governing insurgencies, did not come from a disgruntled State Department holdover from the Carter administration. It originated in the Central Intelligence Agency and was made public by its director, William Casey, through an interview with U.S. News and World Report (April 23, 1984). One Nicaraguan rebel who

heard the CIA director's words over Radio Sandino commented: "Do you know what it does to hear the head of the CIA denigrate our chances of success?" Beyond upsetting the morale of rebel forces, Mr. Casey's remarks compare in an embarrassing fashion with similar assessments made in Washington of a group of insurgents operating in the Cuban countryside in the late 1950s.

Then, Fidel Castro's chances of overthrowing the Batista dictatorship were also judged slim or nonexistent—at first. But eventually the tanks and artillery pieces at Batista's disposal proved to be no match for Castro's lightly armed men.

Early last winter and spring, the three major Nicaraguan rebel forces had scored an impressive string of military victories. From the north, roughly 10,000 guerrillas under the banner of the FDN (Democratic Forces) were operating in a north-south line through the center of the country, in Jinotega, Matagalpa, Boaco and Chontales provinces. They had effectively cut off the country's strategic road to the Atlantic Coast.

From the south, ARDE (Revolutionary Democratic Alliance) had made inroads and briefly occupied the garrison town of San Juan del Norte. In the northeast, Indian warriors of the Miskito, Sumo and Rama nations roamed at random. But the CIA's bungling of the mining operations, resulting in Congress turning its back on the freedom fighters down south, stalled the advance and bought time for the Sandinistas.

The setback forced the squabbling rebel factions into political action aimed at unity. On July 24, in Panama, ARDE and FDN pledged, in part, the following:

- "To struggle united until our country, oppressed by a Marxist-Leninist totalitarian regime and occupied by foreign troops, is freed. . . ."

- "To install in Nicaragua a transition government of national conciliation"

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